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CRETAN EXPEDITION

XX

A VISIT TO THE GROTTA OF CAMARES ON MOUNT IDA

IN the preceding chapter I have frequently alluded to the pottery discovered by peasants in the votive cavern or Grotto of Camares, in the southern ridge of Mount Ida, which was examined by Dr. Mariani, Mr. Myres, and Mr. A. J. Evans. But since none of the three visited the grotto,—nor any one else so far as I know up to the present time,—I think it not inopportune to describe a visit made by me in June, 1894, after having, in company with Professor Halbherr, explored the region which extends from Gortyna to the southern slopes of the mountain.

As I have intimated in the chapter upon the Acropolis of Phaestos, I came upon evident proofs, amid the remains of that city, that the primitive ceramic industry, of which the Grotto of Camares had revealed the existence, was not restricted to that point, but was common to a wide district which had Phaestos for its capital, and flourished at a period which from the remote Amorgine age extended to and attained its full development in the Mycenaean age.

Of this district the Grotto of Camares was the religious centre; hence of great interest must be the exploration of the place to discover the sources of one of the two remote phases of culture which flourished so remarkably in the island of Crete.

Two causes made difficult an accurate exploration of the

grotto when I visited the island: the conditions of personal security in this region through which numerous bandits, *φυρόδικοι*, were then wandering; but more mighty than this obstacle, which I could easily have overcome through the assistance of the Camares mountaineers and the shepherds of Ida, — all relations and hence partizans of the bandits, — was the obstacle of the snow, which had fallen in such quantities during the preceding winter as quite to prevent Evans and Myres from reaching the grotto, and still, even June, rendered access to it very difficult.

Mine was then merely a visit, and as such I present it to my readers, in the hope that these few pages may induce some of the archaeologists now on the island to continue researches there.

I reached Camares, starting together with Professor Halbherr from Gortyna, and first traversing the hilly undulated region — in part cultivated — between the plain of Messarà and the valley in which Courtes lies, crossing the districts of Pluti, Moroni, and Courtes, then exclusively inhabited by Mohammedans. From thence by Scurvola and Gligoria, we attack the first ascents which spread out from the central mass of Ida, reaching below Temeneli, the large and deep valley which descends through Lagolio toward Dibaki, a wide valley of austere beauty, at the head of which stands Camares, situated at the crossing of two little valleys that descend steeply from the upland of Ida. From Temeneli to Camares it is all a girdling round of gorges crushed between rocky peaks, and ample shell-like hollows smiling with groves and cultivated fields; below, along the limpid and murmuring stream, the fragrant oleanders alternate with the cork trees, which are succeeded by the chestnut and beech; far above, among the heights where vegetation has completely ceased, soars the two-peaked mountain of Camares, the most southern of the Idaean chain, cut east and west by two deep valleys which unite near Camares, while toward the north it descends almost sheer down to the tableland of Nida.

This double-peaked mountain, which is distinctly seen from the whole of Messarà and from the Kato Riza, for these regions apparently represents the most salient feature of Mount Ida; since, more than any other mountain of the chain, with striking outlines it dominates the plain, hiding the true summit of Ida, which is more to the northwest, and stretches with its vast and ponderous ridge, at least 500 m. higher, to dominate the districts of Axos and Eleutherna.

At the foot of this mountain is Camares, a dirty and miserable village, like all the mountain villages, and not free from leprosy. It is composed of thirty or forty houses inhabited by coaldealers and woodcutters of the mountains, shepherds and peasants,—all, or mostly, Christians,—of proud and independent temper, and disposed to resist the injustice of a hated and despised rule. Many of them possessed vases and fragments of pottery found in the surrounding Mycenaean necropolis, for the most part of later style.

I also examined the Mycenaean necropolis, which came to light in the treasure-hunt pursued by the peasants, to the southwest of the village; it occupies the summit of a hill at the meeting of two valleys, in a locality well adapted for a Mycenaean settlement, and cut at its eastern limit by the deep furrow of the valley which skirts it. The field of the necropolis is called *τῆς καϋμένης σόπατον*, and is the property of a poor leper called Constantinos Protogeraki.

I explored four tombs already ransacked by the peasants and stripped of all the material they contained. As is given in the accompanying plan (Fig. 1), they are at about 25 m. from the extreme eastern limit of this field. They are excavated in the ground and buried, and are in the form of small *tholos*, common to so many tombs of the Mycenaean type in the island of Crete and in the Aegean world.

According to the peasants, the tombs were seven; but of the four I was able to examine, three were situated on a single line near each other, and equally oriented, with the aperture toward the east, and at little depth below the surface. A fourth was

slightly northwest of the others, but with the same orientation of the three near tombs. One, the most southern, was 2 m. in diameter by 1.60 m. in height; the central was 2.40 m. in diameter by 1.80 m. high; the northern, 2 m. by 1.60 m. All were constructed with bits of calcareous stone, regularly splintered so as to fit into each other, without any mortar or clasping metal rings, and making a beehive-like dome. The

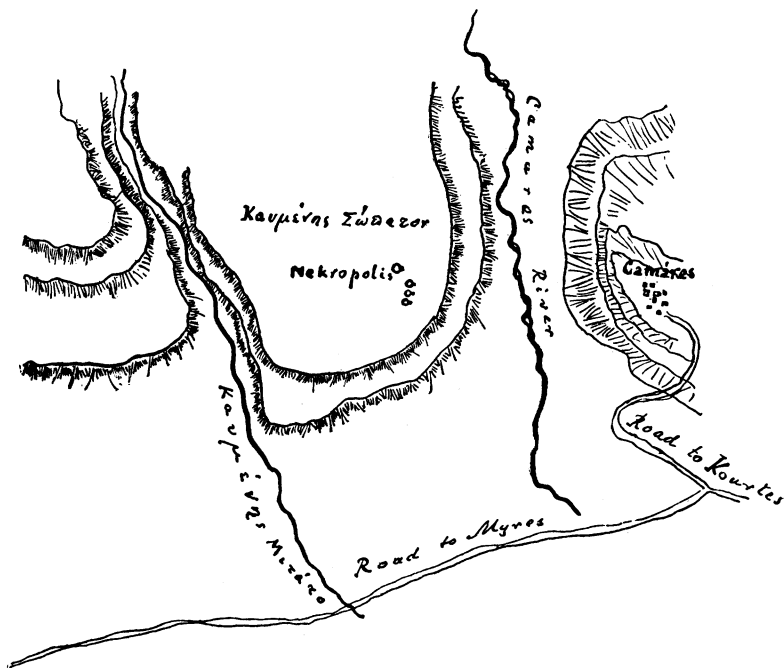


FIGURE 1.—CAMARES AND VICINITY.

profile, in spite of the long interval of centuries, had been perfectly maintained. The three tombs had small doors on the east side about 0.50 m. high and 0.45 m. wide, giving into a *dromos* of the visible length of, say, a metre, covered, as well as the door, with stones.

Perhaps here, as I suppose was also the case in the tombs of Courtes, there was first excavated a well for the *tholos* and the *dromos* large enough to build them in the open air. When

they were completed they were entirely covered up with earth, and on occasion of interments this was removed above the

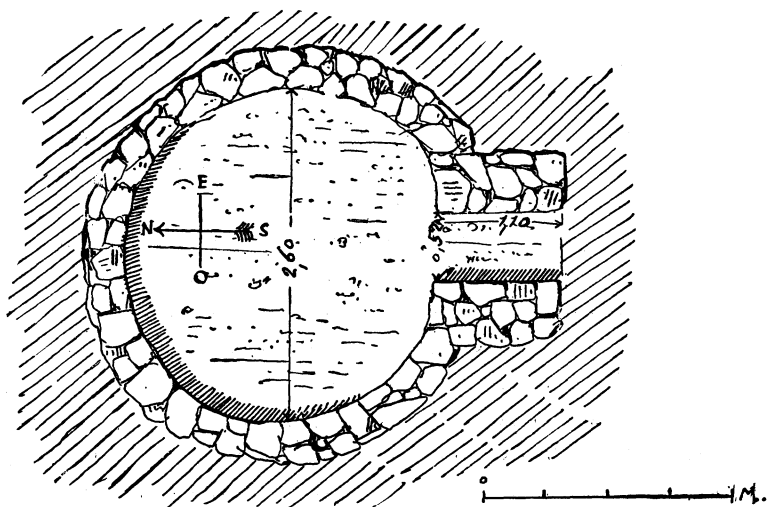
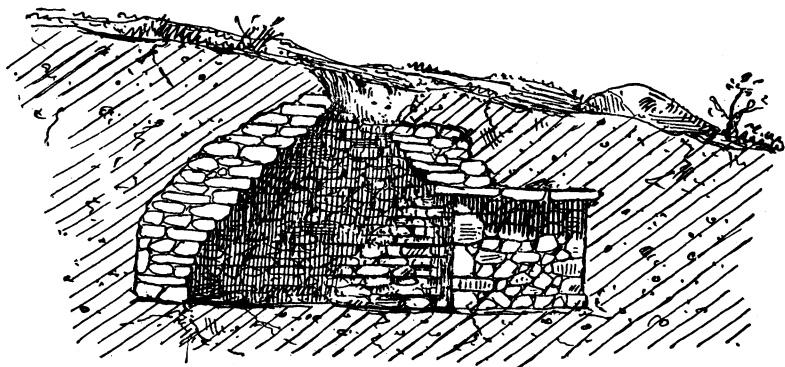


FIGURE 2.—THOLOS TOMB NEAR CAMARES.

dromos, at a spot marked by a *stele* or some kind of *σῆμα*, and burial was made.

Furthermore, what Perrot and others suppose took place for the large *tholos* of the Mycenaean type, is the same as would

happen for the Neolithic and Eneolithic *tumuli* with a sepulchral chamber; these must have had something more than a casual relation to or coincidence with the Mycenaean *tholos*.¹

The other tomb, situated more to the north, with the same type of *tholos*, is 2.20 m. in diameter by 2 m. in height. The *dromos* is longer, 1.40 m., but is, like the others, closed by a rough wall.

Although the peasants, with the extravagance too common to the Cretan country-folk, related wonders about the treasures discovered in the tombs, their dimensions and appearance indicated poor families, which, from the utensils shown me, must have belonged to the extreme decadence of Mycenaean culture. The tombs had been rifled of their grave-chattels, but in all the four I found remains of the bones of their occupants. In the most northern I saw traces of the bones of the pelvis; in the central *tholos* of the three southern, where they said seven skeletons had been found, all laid with head toward the west and feet to the east, I found still in their places the tibias of two different persons, one apparently a boy, the other a man of tall stature. In the different tombs I found some broken pieces of yellowish pottery, covered with interwoven red lines and a shapeless fragment of bronze.

I do not know whether a fine bronze axe with semicircular double edge belongs to the necropolis or to the votive grotto. It has a round hole in the middle and repeats the type indicated by Montelius as classic of the Greek Bronze Age, and met with at Mycenae, Tiryns, and in the Troad.² It was offered me by a relative of the proprietor of the ground, Constantinos Protogeraki, and purchased by me for the Museum of Candia, whither it went to keep company with other very fine examples from the cave of Scotinò in Pediada, from Arvi near Hierapetra, and from other localities of the island.

¹ Perrot, *op. cit.* p. 54.

² Tsountas, *Μυκηναίαι*, p. 161; Perrot, *op. cit.* VI, p. 842; Schliemann, *Tiryns*, fig. 100; Chantre, *L'âge de pierre et du bronze en Troade et en Grèce (Materiaux pour l'hist. de l'homme)*, IX, p. 36, pl. iii, 4).

The few tombs visited by me are the remains of a necropolis ascribable to a modest centre of population which existed up to the end of the Mycenaean culture. They maintain the normal type of the subterranean tombs, which we find here of a much reduced size, not so much from the degeneration of the type, as some suppose, but in correspondence with the modest needs of the constructors of the burying-place, whose social condition cannot have been very different from that of the present inhabitants of Camares.¹ It is an interesting fact that in the depths of this great valley, under the heights of Ida, in a place not easy of access, slightly fertile, and exposed to the heavy winter snows, a rather numerous group of families should be found existing: it is a sign which, along with many others noted by Mariani, Halbherr, Evans, and myself, clearly shows that the population of the Mycenaean period was diffused not only in the plains and along the coasts of Crete, but all over the country, even in the most remote and inaccessible mountain valleys, where it subsisted apparently by pasture or the cutting down of the woods, which in early times, as Pliny and Theophrastus attest,² thickly clothed the hills to a much greater height than at present, — perhaps under more favorable conditions of climate.

Nor can the idea be excluded that the situation of Camares, at the foot of the mountain in which the grotto lies, was not in some relation with the sanctuary, if for no other reason than as a halting-place for the devotees continually resorting thither from the Phaestian plain and from the valleys of Courtes, Zarò, etc. And such a fatiguing climb, of at least four hours, was for the pilgrims a sort of propitiation of the divinity, for

¹ I have to note here that I came upon other traces of a Mycenaean settlement slightly to the west of the necropolis, situated near the spacious valley called *καὶμένης μῦδρο*: these consisted especially of pieces of large *pithoi* of terra-cotta, mostly coarse, internally grayish-red, ornamented with parallel stripes scratched; there were also fragments of pyxides, of *oinochoae*, and of so-called *Bügelkannen*, scattered over the surface of the field.

² Plin. *Hist. Nat.* XVI, 26; Theophrast. *Hist. Plant.* 3, 5. See also *Etymol. Magn.* s. 'Αρκέρσιον.

they gained the height with no slight difficulty, and were purified in a bath of deliciously pure and balsamic air.

The side of the mountain ascends in enormous gradations of calcareous rock steeply toward the two-headed summit; and the tortuous path winds close to the precipices clothed with asphodel and fragrant salvias; here and there, where they can obtain standing-ground, larches and pine trees permeate the air with their resinous, healthful odors, while on every side spring forth purest fountains whose margins are crowned with flowers. As we ascend higher and higher, below our feet spread the great deep valleys, dark with woods, of Gligoria and Temeneli; opposite loom the huge and sterile masses of Kandanos and Kedrios; farther off, beyond the plain of Messarà, the mountains of the Kato Riza are veiled in violet; and still farther again we behold the azure, calm, infinite sea, set with the solitary Paximadia island, and the distant Gaudos, which gleams in it like a white sail.

To those who ascend from the sun-baked plain of Messarà, the invigorating coolness of those hills, with their lively suggestions of the Italian Alps, offer an indescribable refreshment and a stimulus to prosecute the ascent. The thousand metres being passed, the plants become more rare, only a few pines or firs erect themselves here and there amid the broom and the thyme, which clothe the masses of rock and fling their perfumes on the summer air.

Of an impressive solemnity is the locality where the grotto, — called by the mountaineers Maurospilion, — opens, with a background of peaked rocks, lightning-scathed and lashed by the furious hurricanes which rage against the western summit of Mount Camares. The grotto yawns like the enormous jaw of a monster, in the steep flank of the mountain, so that there is but a narrow shelf of standing-ground in front; this is much encumbered with masses of rock fallen from the upper heights, or rolled down from the sides of the hill, so as to fill up the space where the votive altar stood in ancient times.

As may be seen from the subjoined sketch, which is based on

a photograph of mine (Fig. 3), the mouth of the Grotto of Camares is a rude natural arch from 18 to 20 m. high. At the base the entrance is 42 m. wide, while the terrace in front, as well as we could ascertain through the rocks and boulders encumbering it, may have a width of 50 m., and a projection in front of the cavern of, at the most, 30 m. The interior of the grotto (Fig. 4) is also blocked with stones rolling down immediately above the entrance; but it has a very strong incline downward, which was still filled with snow, as it were a deep well, and which, according to my guide, never altogether melts.

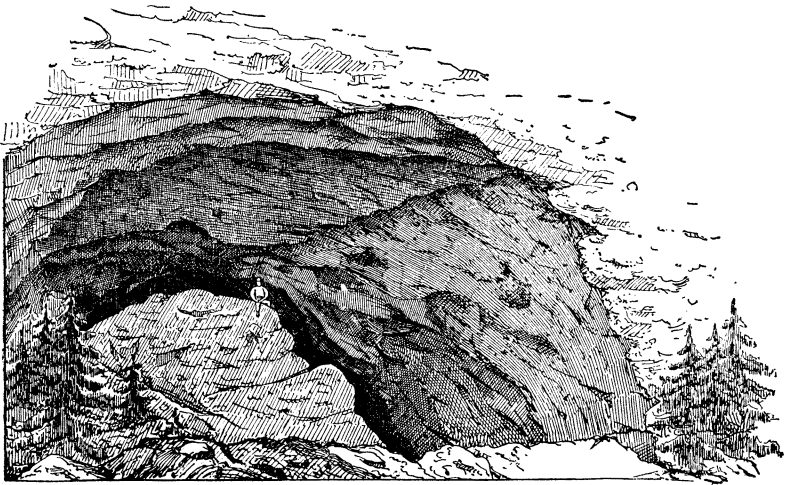


FIGURE 3.—ENTRANCE TO THE GROTTO OF CAMARES.

If one considers the aspect of the place in such an elevated region, and that the grotto is more than anything else a deep well in the mountain side, one might suppose that the votive altar, with the archaeological deposit, should be sought for near the mouth, under the fallen masses. Still, following the assertions of my guide, I descended to the bottom of the first part of the cave, to the depth of 50 m., but fully lighted from the ample mouth. Here a small channel about 1 m. in width leads down to the lower depths of the cave. Crawling upon all fours with my men, I presently found myself in a kind of gallery,

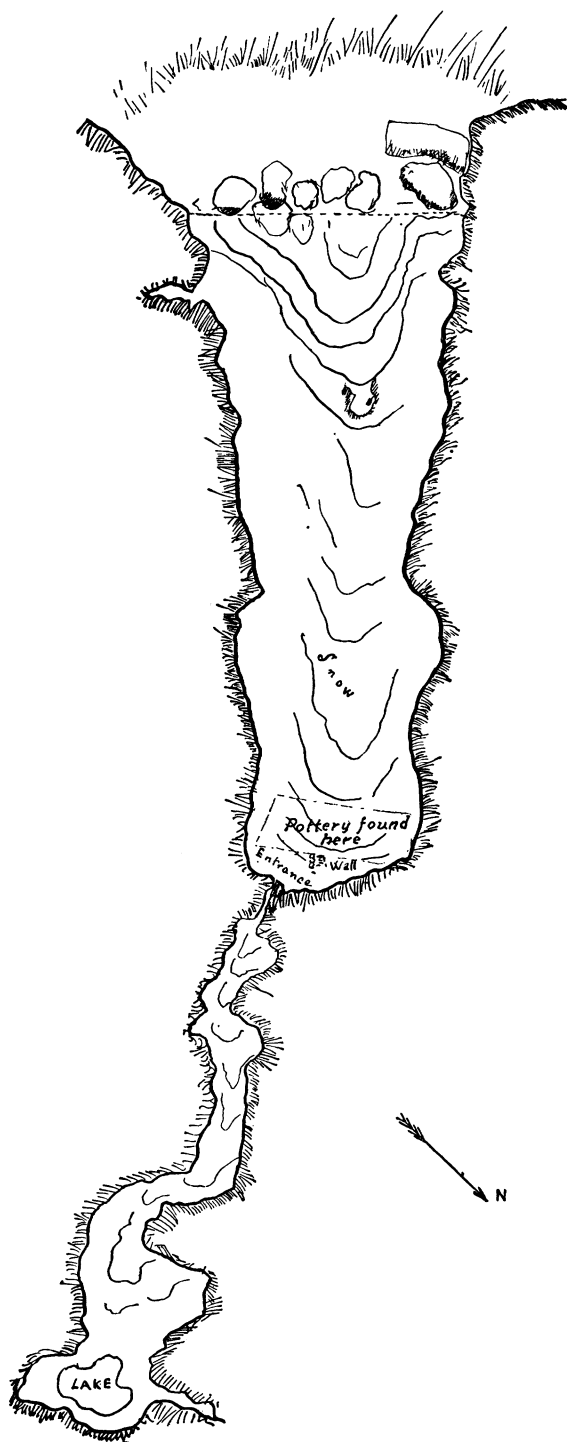


FIGURE 4. — THE GROTTO OF CAMARES: GROUND PLAN.

through which I descended, with the aid of resinous torches. It continued, always with an inclination downward, and with a height of from 10 to 12 m., until it reached a kind of hall encrusted with stalactites, at the bottom of which, in a bed of gravel, was a little lake of purest water. Amongst the objects littering the gallery, where the temperature is extremely cold, we came upon bones of animals, goats and *agrimi* and the skull of an ox ; in the mud I found various fragments of pottery

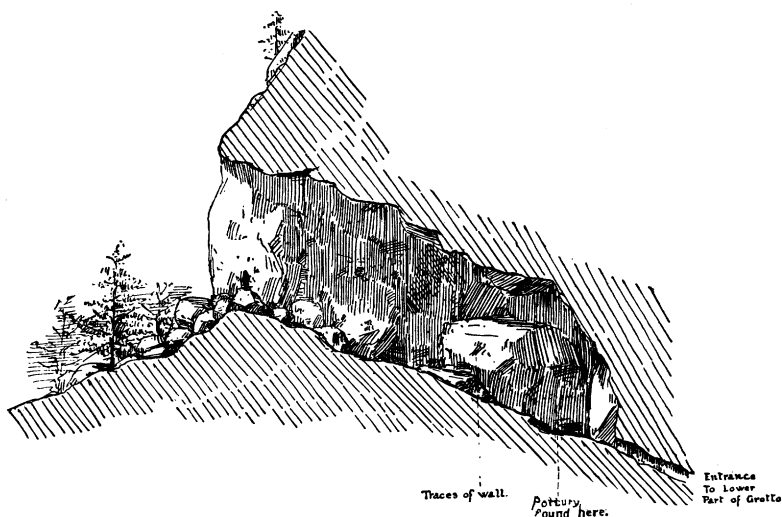


FIGURE 5.—ENTRANCE TO THE GROTTO OF CAMARES: SECTION.

encrusted with the calcareous elements of the water. Amongst others I found a decanter-shaped vase, quite entire, with triangular mouth, narrow neck, and wide body. The surface was slightly encrusted, but the charming ornament was quite visible, in brown zones, directing themselves toward the round base of the vase ; the form was identical with those of the Amorgine type, found in the deposit at H. Onuphrios.¹

Besides these there were other broken bits of pottery, probably swept into this subterranean gallery by the rain-water and

¹ Evans, *The H. Onuphrios Deposit* (*Cret. Pictographs*, p. 114, fig. 106, a, b).

melted snow : this was the only way to account for their presence in such a place.

Reascending into the upper portion of the grotto, which is, as I said before, in full light, and having a warmer temperature, I examined the narrow ridge of ground which remained clear of the thick mass of snow that filled the depth of the cave. It was just here that my companions asserted they had found the vases offered to Dr. Hatzidaki, which are now in the Museum of the Syllogos of Candia, and there in fact I could obtain the proofs that for once, at least, those Cretans had not lied.

Clearing away some of the black mud produced by the drop-pings from the outer snow, there appeared distinct traces of mason-work composed of rude calcareous blocks, rudely fashioned into squares and arranged one against the other without any mortar : these blocks bore evident traces of having served as a hearth. I excavated for a space 5 m. wide and 2 m. in length in the midst of the black mud and earth, already turned up by the spades of the mountaineers in search of treasure, and I was able to find a certain quantity of ceramic fragments which represented, alas ! the whole of my archaeological booty. This household pottery belonged to the various types characteristic of the successive stages of culture evolved in the island.

(a) Utensils roughly modelled in clay mixed with gravel, wrought by hand, baked at an open fire without trace of superficial ornament either plastic or painted, except some waved zone or band of zigzag scratched in the unbaked clay with a pointed stick.

(b) Vessels, also rude, modelled by hand, such as coarse winejars (vases with spouts and round bottoms); other vases with the surface painted yellowish or cream-color, with painted ornaments in zones and bands of Amorgine type.

(c) Other earthenware vessels in very fine clay of thin consistency and well baked, with a kind of blackish enamel tending to green, or even red, upon which were leaf and floral ornaments, fans, — even animal elements of the *fauna marina*, such as horse-fish and star-fish, of doubtful color, and almost wholly destroyed by damp. Along with these painted specimens were also objects in the plastic style, such as little knots or globules, forming the characteristics observed in this class of pottery by Evans, Mariani, and Myres.

(d) Some pottery fragments of the classic Mycenaean type, of fine clay, marked by the wheel and well baked, the surface covered with a polished enamel of a yellow or red ground, upon which, also in enamel, were polished brown or white or black bands with leaves, ribbons, circlets, and stars, and other ornamental motives usually found in Mycenaean pottery.

The similarity in the type of the Camares pottery, with its earthy colors, violet, white, red, orange, standing out in such strong contrast with the black enamel of the ground, and the more primitive so-called Therean, seems to support the assertion of Evans,¹ who, after examining the collection existing in the Museum of Candia, had arrived at the conclusion "that the ceramic class here represented, though of archaic aspect, may slightly overlap the more purely Mycenaean pottery in the island."

It is possible to base another observation upon the material hitherto excavated in the grotto, and that is, in it we have a place of worship which seems much more ancient than that of the Idaean cave in the northern limb of the same chain. Whilst the antiquities found there by Halbherr ascend from the Hellenic age to the period immediately post-Mycenaean, that is to say, to the beginning of the first millennium before our era, the Grotto of Camares, on the other hand, offers the traces of a worship of a much more ancient epoch, the epoch in fact to which the tombs of Phaestos and H. Onuphrios bear testimony, as also the deposits of Arvi, the stratum of sepulture in the grotto of Miamû, and so many other sporadic discoveries at Praesos, Goulàs, and other places in Crete.

Whoever next explores the Grotto of Camares ought to undertake the removal of that enormous mass of snow, the accumulation possibly of centuries, and search for a stratum of ground still undisturbed; he will perhaps be so fortunate as not only to discover objects of chronological importance, but also the regular succession of archaeological strata. Certainly this huge cavern, with the enormous yawning jaws which give it an aspect so hideous, plunging down into the abysses of the

¹ Evans, *op. cit.* p. 81.

sacred mountain, must have appeared — like the Idaean cave, like the cave of Psychró — as a vestibule to the infernal regions. From thence emanated the spirit of the divinity; thence issued the voice of the god who spoke in the hurricane and lived amid the thunderbolts and the winter storms, or smiled upon the world in the ineffably serene dawns of the Hellenic spring.

When the soul of the Greeks was in a lively creative ferment of myths and legends, of divinities and cults; when the divine idea had not yet been rent and divided into the subtle and manifold divisions of names and types, such as we find them in the Homeric or post-Homeric age, — it must have been the god of light, thunder, and, at the same time, tempest and infernal darkness, who was venerated on this mountain, — Mount Ida, — where the two caves of Nida, on the upland, and this of Camares, yawn dark and mysterious.¹ Hence, in this case, the worship of the god in the cavern was not, as Diodorus Siculus remarks, a simple remembrance of the Troglodyte phase of Cretan culture; but is to be considered as an attempt at propitiating the divinity who, from the summit of the mountain, dominated the whole of his island. And such a divinity, who had his shrine in deep abysmal caverns, it was very natural to surround with a character of *χθόνιος δαίμων*; and such, in fact, he is revealed in the narrative of Pythagoras's and Epimenides's legendary ascent to the Idaean cavern, which may very well have been this of Camares. The poets ascended the mountain and made the propitiatory sacrifices to Zeus, wrapped in black robes,² and otherwise following the ritual imposed in the worship of the divinity.³

Not for nothing was the mighty mountain which dominates

¹ Besides these two principal caverns, I visited another one, much smaller, on the same mountain; and it is the *Voidospilion*, a grotto a few metres in dimensions, opening on the south flank of the Mount Camares, at little distance from the great shrine; in it I found nothing to suggest that it had been either inhabited or held sacred.

² Diog. Laert. VIII, 3.

³ Porphyry. *Pyth.* 17; Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* IV, 9, 145: *Εἰς δὲ τὸ Ἰδαίων καλούμενον ἄντρον καταβὰς, ἔρια ἔχων μελάνα τὰς νενομισμένας τριττὰς ἑννέα ἡμέρας ἐκεῖ διέτριψε.*

Crete with its compact mass — which from afar presents itself to the navigators of the Aegean Sea — called the throne of Zeus, the centre of his worship;¹ not for nothing were the Cretans distinguished by the title “Sons of Ida,”² since the principal families of the race inhabiting the heart of the island have their sanctuary and place of worship in the flanks of the mountain.

Whilst the inhabitants of Cnossus, the Axians, and the Eleuthernaeanes went on pilgrimages to the other Idaean cave, upon the northeast flank of Ida, near the tableland now called Nida, the natives of Gortyna, the Phythians, and the people of “Phaestia regna” climbed the steep ascent to the *Μαυροσπήλαιον* of Camares, chanting hymns of praise and invocations to the supreme Pelasgic divinity, the supreme Zeus, sometimes the terrible “earth-shaker,” sometimes the placidly-smiling (*μειλίχιος*) upon his devoted children.

ANTONIO TARAMELLI.

TURIN, 1899.

¹ Plat. *Legg.* I, 1.

² Aristoph. *Ranae*, 1356: ‘Ἄλλ’, ὦ Κρήτες, Ἰδας τέκνα, τὰ τόξα λαβόντες ἐπαμύνατε.